

WHAT DO PAYMENT PLANS PROVIDE?

As a former GDP, Deputy Chief Dental Officer at Denplan, Henry Clover, understands the kind of issues facing the profession and the impact they can have on your business. Here he discusses how the team that arranges your payment plan can offer you advice and guidance on these issues, while also providing a range of services to ensure your practice continues to thrive long into the future.

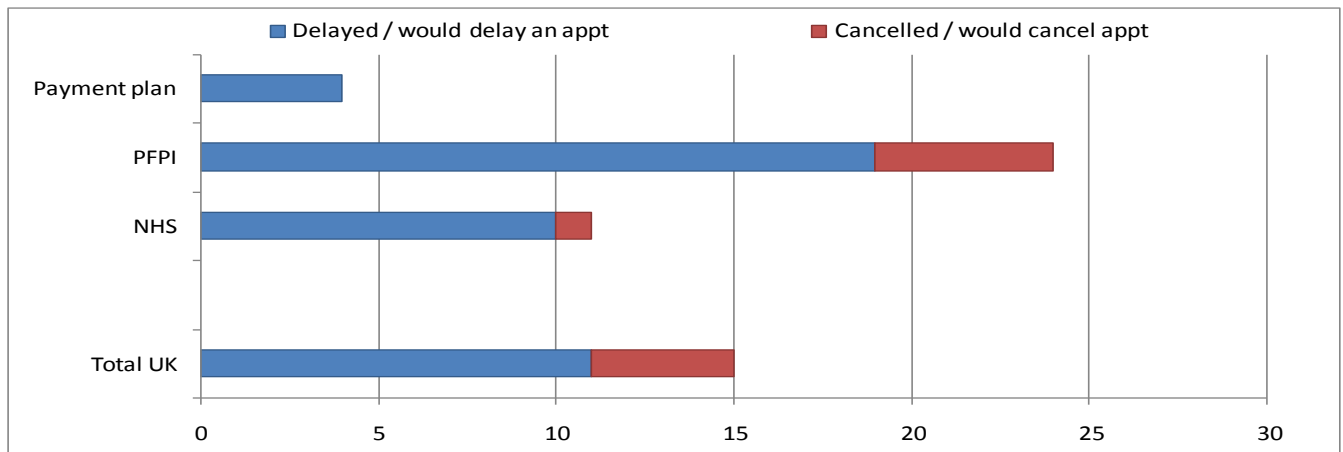
Dental practices are faced with what often seems like a constant stream of new or changed legislation, regulation, reports and guidance. And it's not always clear what impact these may have in the real world of a busy practice. Equally, time constraints mean that keeping an eye on the horizon for what may lie ahead can often take a low priority. For example, over the last four years, we have seen the new NHS contract and subsequent Steele Review, the GDC piloting re-validation, the Dental Access Programme introducing another new NHS contract ("PDS Plus") and stringent decontamination guidelines. Add into the mix the largest economic crisis for decades, and it is hardly surprising that general practice can be stressful and demanding.

So, what, you may ask, has all this possibly got to do with payment plans? The information below is designed to show how payment plan's can offer far more than financial stability; by keeping you informed and providing a raft of additional services, you can concentrate on offering the preventive, patient-focused dentistry you trained for.

Plans and attendance

An often cited reason for introducing a payment plan is to help practices stabilise revenue and encourage patients' regular attendance, by allowing them to budget for the cost of maintaining their oral health. Denplan's own research has reflected this and Figure 1 indicates the delaying behaviour of patients in the UK:

Figure 1 - Changes in dental attendance



(Source: TNS/YouGov, October 2009 - 2025 adults)

Payment plans can also be enormously beneficial in maintaining patient loyalty to your practice, particularly where PCTs are taking a more proactive approach to increasing access to NHS dentistry.

Professional support

This may be stating the obvious, but the profession has not escaped its share of regulation and legislation in recent years and the extent to which this is occurring can be, at times, bewildering and exasperating. The time and money which needs to be taken to comply and keep up-to-date with these can also place a real strain on practices.

If you had a team solely dedicated to keeping abreast of legislation, it would be both expensive and impractical, but this is where payment plan specialists can step in. Some not only keep you current with news and developments within the dental industry, but develop useful template protocols and advice manuals and give access to a wealth of information and practical guidance online.

Some providers can also offer a more hands-on approach to professional support, offering quality assurance programmes designed to ensure that you meet industry standards and comply with regulation. This applies not just clinically, but also for the business support you need to really attract new patients and secure loyalty in your existing ones.

Training and development

With the current economic climate still anything but stable, it's easy to understand why some practices have put training and development on the 'back-burner'. However, CPD is mandatory for all GDC registrants, so it's really important that practices utilise helpful services and training to make their lives easier. Some providers offer tailor-made training days, which can incorporate modules suitable for the whole practice team; as well as offering verifiable CPD, so this can be a great place to start.

Ideally, development through learning should be structured and driven by the needs of individuals rather than sporadic attendance at courses on a favoured topic. The Denplan Stairway programme, for example, adopts a modular approach, linking small group workshops with reflective practice-based assessments. The subjects covered are aligned with part of the educational requirements for an MSc in primary care, something which could be highly useful for colleagues who may choose to gain additional qualifications in the future, yet relevant at any stage of your practicing career.

Business growth

Image and marketing are powerful tools when it comes to supporting your practice and growing your business. That's why some payment plan specialists have developed a raft of training and literature designed to help promote your practice to the outside world, as well as bespoke public relations services to get your latest news, comments and achievements into your local paper.

Furthermore, by choosing a specialist with a recognised brand, not only can you benefit from the association with a larger organisation, you can also draw upon the knowledge and expertise of a network of other professionals, dentists and members of the practice team for help, guidance and industry news.

Work-life balance

If you are already running a successful private practice, you are probably aware of the benefits of having the regular income provided through payment plans. Accepting plan administration as a given, it's important to look at what else is on offer for your money. Not only do some providers offer ways to reward you for growing your practice, they can also provide the opportunity for you to meet other people in similar roles through charity events, conferences and hospitality.

I converted my own practice away from the NHS, back in 1993 and, in my experience, offering a payment plan can have a hugely positive impact on your business. But, things have really moved on leaps and bounds since then and by utilising the additional services supplied by your provider you can discover a wealth of value-added services to help your practice not just survive, but thrive!

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Top ten list of things to look for in a payment plan provider:

1. Bespoke plans tailored to individual practice needs
2. Professional support and helpful literature
3. Dedicated, local consultants
4. Practical advice on Decontamination and other legislation
5. Clinical training for dentists
6. Professional training for the whole practice team
7. Marketing support and Public Relations services
8. Social networking opportunities
9. A comprehensive business support service
10. A quality programme designed to ensure you meet industry standards.

About the author

Dr Henry Clover - Deputy Chief Dental Officer

Henry is a former general dental practitioner who converted his own practice to private practice in 1993. With his experience as a Denplan member dentist, he joined Denplan's Professional Services department on a part-time basis in 1998 and full-time in 1999, with responsibility for professional support and member services.

Henry has now been promoted to Deputy Chief Dental Officer and is responsible for the Professional Services team as well as being a member of the Executive Leadership Team, supporting Denplan's motto – 'By Dentists, For Dentists'.